

Interview with Joanne Byrd, 5/25/94 Director of exhibits and programs at the Teton County Historical Society. Interview conducted at the Historical Society building.

Joanne: I am Joanne Byrd, and my husband was one of the, I think so-called original Exum Guides. Bill was there probably in the late 40s and was one of the first guides, and we lived on Guide's Hill, just above where the present climbing concession is near Jenny Lake in tent houses up there for a number of years.

Bill was guiding with Glenn in the late 40s, and we were married and living on Guide's hill from '54, probably ten years.

If you walk up the hill, close to Cottonwood Creek, just a little hill above where the present guide's concession is, there were at one time five or six, [tent houses] and we built our own wooden floored, put tent frames, and actually had a little village there. It is very very different now because at that time there were beautiful trees, and they were not that visible, kind of tucked in to the trees and it was a nice little area. The tents were I think 12 by 14 wooden floored, and we got the canvas out and put it up in the spring when we came. Ours was, we had a wonderful time with it, we built a little deck out of cottonwood and had candelabra of wooden gnarls of wood, and it was just lovely. Of course we had outhouses at that time, we had no running water, washing facilities or anything of that kind. We had kerosene lights only and as a matter of fact during the time that we were there we were asked to vote on whether we wanted electricity up on the hill and we voted it down. We just enjoyed the old-fashioned way of living.

We had four children. We used to bring them out in our wagon in cardboard boxes, and we actually had a small tent for the children with four bed frames and they slept right next to us, of course. And actually, the Unsoeld's were with us during the same time, and I think the Unsoeld's had three little children, no they had four.

We had campfires. We cooked largely over the campfires. We had huge vats of water that we dipped into and shared washing and had washboards to wash with. We had bear visitations.

[JW: You were their food source? JB: [laughing] We were their food source.]

Jean: How did growing up on Guide's hill influence the lives of the children?

Joanne: I think that our children were absolutely, I should probably say any of the children involved, were absolutely enthralled with the lifestyle. They ran either without clothes and certainly with no problem of how they should be dressed properly. Our days were spent, I would sweep out the tent house by mid-morning and do the washing so that we had all of our days. We hiked a lot. We went up to String Lake and played in the water a lot. We canoed and boated and walked up to get our daddy's coming down from the mountain. We went down, often when our daddy's were on top of the Grand we had a flash signal, the children loved that. We would take our car down to the turnout near Jenny Lake and flash with a mirror, and he would flash back. We'd have a little SOS signal. Usually in the morning or at noon, by the time that they would have arrived on top.

Life was extremely simple, I think more simple than any of us can imagine. It was, we had a fine camaraderie with the people in the camp. The Exums of course were in the CCC shelter, where the guide's concession still is. It was a close-knit group, we very often lit the campfire in the evening and sat around it and talked or sang, and people from all over the world would drop in to our campfire sessions. Very often tourists or visitors would join us at a campfire or meet some of us on a climb and be invited to join us, so it was a very exciting time, from the standpoint of being able to meet and know people. We all knew a number of people in the valley who were included in our campfires.

Jean: Did you share meals?

Joanne: We would dine together only occasionally.

The Exums were an integral part of all of our lives. They are very very sociable people. They were constantly doing things for the

guides, entertaining us with steak fries and any number of things that they just did through their caring for us. They were for me like parents, and still are, they are very, very dear. Glenn is very very verbal and very charming. He played the guitar and sang and had a beautiful voice and is a wonderful storyteller. He entertained us by the hours. As a group and individually, when we reciprocated with the entertaining and at ranches around the valley.

Jean: Were there single guides there at the time, or mainly families?

Joanne: At the time that I arrived, I think that there were four of us married, and I guess only two, the Unsoeld's and we, had children during the period that we were up there. Bob Miriam and his wife, and Dick Pownall, and Nancy, and there were several single guides came. Barry Corbet, Jake Breitenbach, he later married Lou. And Pete Sinclair, he may have been there at that time. So there were three or four single guides. I don't think the single guides lived on the hill. We married folks kind of built those tents.

Jean: And that was an incentive to get married, so you could have better housing! Did Glenn and Beth take care of the single men? And did they have their own family?

Joanne: Beth and Glenn fed the single guides. All of us, they were parents to all of us. When I entered the scene at Guide's hill, I think Eddy, their son would have been nine years old and Glenda was 11.

Jean: Do you remember any funny stories or funny things that happened while up at Guide's Hill?

Joanne: You asked earlier about the children and the animals, and they did actually, the wild animals, were sort of their pets. They were hiking and living near the bear and the moose and the deer and the elk, the children actually grew up in that environment and have had a real appreciation for the out of doors. The bear, [chuckles] problem was -- we had little ice boxes outside and stored our food in the ice boxes and the bear came almost nightly.

They were old fashioned ice boxes with the ice on the top and you

chip the ice off for drinks and of course that was where we stored our meat. And the bear were as I say nightly visitors, the children have one story on me. They were out one night not in their tent but camping outside which was a great thing they liked to do, this was very brave.

Jean: So they could see the stars?

Joanne: Uh huh, just be out there with no protection. [We laugh] And they were camping and they came tearing in, "Bear, mommy, bear!" And I simply picked up the broom and went out and shooed the bear away, and the children have loved telling that tale over the years. It wasn't that courageous, it was just a useful tool at the time. They do like to tell that, I think, thinking it was a sign of bravery.

Our children that were there were Ted, our oldest was there from the time he was nine months old he came out. And then Terry and then Susan, and the three of them were there with us for ten years. Brad, we have another child who was born in Puerto Rico when we were in the Peace Corp. He didn't get in on the experience because we didn't return when we came back.

Jean: What did you do the rest of the year when you weren't living on Guide's Hill?

Joanne: Most of us were teaching at that time. Our husbands were teaching. I think all of our husbands at that time were teaching, then we had the summers, which was an ideal life. My husband was teaching up the Mackenzie river at the Mackenzie high school. His subject was history. We would come here for three months, June, July and August.

Jean: So you were doing same thing that Glenn and Beth were doing. I know that guiding was starting to become a profession at this time. Was there an awareness at that time that they were pioneering the sport?

Joanne: I just read Pete Sinclair's book, and I think that they may have had that feeling when they were on McKinley on a new route,

and certainly all of the guides were exploring new routes, but I don't think there was an awareness of it being so unique as it was at that particular time. I think it was just something we were all involved in and extremely excited about and interested in, but I don't think that there was any feeling of it being, breaking, pioneering in that sense.

Jean: Was it difficult being the wife of someone who was climbing all the time?

Joanne: I don't think that I ever worried at all. I just felt, you know, a great deal of confidence in all of the guide's ability. Glenn was marvelous, he was extremely concerned about safety, did provide training and did provide conditioning periods in the spring, and during that time I'm sure, during the time we were there I'm sure there were accidents, but I think very very few, not that many people were climbing.

Jean: Were you aware of other guide schools?

Joanne: My guess would be that it was one of the very very few guide schools at that time.

Jean: Looking back historically, the people who were on guide's hill went on to accomplish unusual, groundbreaking climbing feats throughout the world. From this perspective that you have now looking back, is there any reason why that happened with this group of people? Was Glenn fostering something that enabled people, or encouraged people to continue with their accomplishments?

Joanne: I think Glenn fostered, he is one of the most affirmative people that I've ever known in my life. One of the most appreciative. I've never known anyone who appreciates life more, appreciates people more, is more encouraging, and I'm sure he opened avenues, I'm sure that he was in a position of meeting any number of people from all over the world, and was probably consulted about expeditions or about things that were going on. He was an authority in the field and no doubt opened doors, and the group of guides at that time were extremely capable young people and very enthusiastic and adventuresome, and in that sense did come to a

point where they were interested in exploring, and progressing.

Jean: So the type of person that he attracted or hired on to the guide service tended to be the kind of person who would achieve and go on to explore other parts of the sport.

Joanne: I would say that was true. Bill didn't actually. He was scheduled on an expedition when we were married and had our first child, so I interfered with his plans in that regard. We did through his experience on the hill, meet Josh Minor, and certainly Glenn was instrumental in that because Josh came to Glenn looking for people to introduce the climbing experience to the Peace Corp training program, and of course we did do that. Bill was asked to come and we set up the mountain climbing for part of the Outward Bound training program in Puerto Rico and because of certain circumstances with the director there he was asked to become director and our family was able to join him there which was unusual, there were not that many families involved with the Peace Corp, and they set up that outward bound mountaineering aspect of training. So yes Glenn was extremely instrumental in many ways in our lives, and I think in our opportunities. And we as guides, the folks, each day the guides had interesting people from all over the world, and those initial introductions have proven friendships for all of us throughout the years and led to opportunities.

Jean: How did people find out about the guide school at that time, do you know?

Joanne: Do you know, Jackson Hole has always attracted a great national attraction. When the monument was being established and there was such controversy, Jackson Hole received news all over the U.S., national news, [The Park] I think that initially gave Jackson Hole an unusual amount of publicity and image in international. And I'm sure there was advertising done and word of mouth. The climbing community at that point was fairly closely knit.

The guide's connected with Guide's hill and with the Exums were from all over the U.S., several of the young people were from Dartmouth, and they were climbing actually, some of them, before

they came out here.

And I think that their meeting here, Willie was from Seattle at that point, or Oregon, we were from Oregon. The kind of meeting from the different places in the U.S. made it a broad base, and I think it was, I think you are right, they surely were the pioneers of mountaineering. In all of this I'm sure you'll be exploring the Paul Petzoldt influence and certainly his influence on Glenn.

Jean: Not only that, but Paul was the person who developed the hand signals. He adapted the guide school techniques. He created the techniques which Glenn adapted and brought forth. Why did they do a changing of the guard?

Joanne: I really don't know much of the details, I believe Paul decided to sell out to Glenn and probably for changes in his own life. Talk about a pioneer and adventurer, Paul was and he may, actually when you start thinking about this whole picture, Paul probably is the pioneer of this whole effort, initiated things that brought this all about, and Glenn would be the first person to admit this.

Jean: It was a beautiful partnership. I thought they had differing philosophies. Aggressive advertising, gentleman. Was the Ford incident a factor? I've read On Top of the World. You must have known her [Berniece, Paul's first wife.]

Joanne: Uhm hmmn. And I'm laughing just because when I think of those two people, charismatic immediately comes to my mind. They are characters, extremely interesting characters, and Beth and Glenn on the other hand are very interesting people, I wouldn't classify them as characters, they are just very wonderful people, and very secure, stable, persevering, different qualities, so the whole combination has been good.

I'll tell you something I would think would be very interesting is if you could get Paul and Glenn together. It would be very entertaining and I think they would be willing to do that.

Jean: What fascinates me, the stories Glenn has about the 30s here, and how he and Paul used to run all over I would just love to have

known them then.

Joanne: Glenn was quite a musician you know, and he was a very handsome young man, and he was very very charming. And Paul had another kind of charisma, and their stories at the dances and the brawls and the defending each other and wearing each others clothes. You ask if I could tell stories, I've heard very many and I wish that I could tell them well, but they are the people to get those stories down. If you could get them together.

He [Glenn's brother Ed] had a contract in hollywood. He was very, very talented, also very handsome. Dashing.

Jean: As an historian, how do you view that time period, and what have you noticed in terms of changes over the years with that profession or the school?

Joanne: I view that time period as many of us do, as being one of the greatest times of our lives. I think anyone connected with this valley at that time - one, it was very very small. We knew everyone in the valley practically, you never went into the grocery store or walked around town that you didn't just say hi to everybody. It was a small, very very friendly place. Our time up there was exceptional, I think in that we had the opportunity to meet so many people. The group itself was interesting because we were from different backgrounds and different areas in the United States though had a lot of common interests and the people that we were able to meet there internationally. The campfires in my mind and I think in the minds of everyone who had anything to do at that time were just highlights of our lives because we used to sit from six in the evening sometimes until two in the morning around the campfires just talking and exchanging ideas. It wasn't all fluff and superficial, there was a lot of philosophical discussion, of literary, historical discussion, so it was a learning experience in a sense and a very shared experience. I think all of us remember those times.

We established friendships which have lasted for all of us throughout our lifetime. We've [Jolene Unsoeld and Joanne] kept in touch through the years, Pownalls, Miriams, a feeling of camaraderie

and something shared, a feeling that was unusual.

In comparison today, I have no contact with the present guides and guide service in what's going on. Al was definitely involved. And today, I would guess, you know it would be interesting to know, are there friendships established, is there a feeling of camaraderie among those involved in the concession, are there the opportunities available? My guess is it couldn't possibly be so. My guess would be in numbers we lose the essence.

Jean: What may have changed in terms of leadership when Glenn left?

Joanne: I think I can't answer that question because Glenn was still there when we left for the Peace Corp and following the Peace Corp we left to form the Northwest Outward Bound school. I know that there were some wonderful young people trained by Glenn, with Glenn and Paul. I would guess that they have carried on a very excellent kind of business in professional circles. And probably those involved just following the time that we were there, I think that there must be a lot of the same kind of philosophy.

Jean: What do you know about Beth?

Joanne: Beth is an exceptionally, caring, nurturing person. She was a nurse, which says something in itself. [surgical nurse?] And she was a wonderful, just a wonderful homemaker, her home has always been a gracious, lovely, lovely place. She is a caretaker, she's taken care of everyone she's ever known. She has a great sense of responsibility. Very, very sociable and gracious and outgoing. Lovely, lovely woman, and certainly has been a mainstay for Glenn through all the - they've been so beautiful with each other. Their marriage is an exceptional one and an inspiration again to all of those of us who knew them.

I would like to comment on something you may not have thought of, but it's interesting also. Actually, at that time, the early times, the Rudds had the horse concession right there by the climbing concessions and the Mann McCane had the boat concession just over

the hill and it was all one big family, we were all involved with each other, we never paid for a boat ride, you never paid for a horseback ride, they never paid for a climb. And there was a real feeling.

I think when we compare those times with present day times, I'm not sure we find anywhere that close-knit feeling, and the feeling that when you are interviewing old-timers, homesteaders and the very early people in the valley, you find, "We just all helped each other, we did what needed to be done and we helped each other out." I think there's an aspect there that has been lost, and I think it is a great loss.

Jean: And do you think its lost with numbers, increased numbers?

Joanne: And technology. Don't have time to accept [help] if you do [need it] Technological aspects that have taken place, have just taken us all away. It seems that life is so speeded up, we just simply don't have the time to ---It certainly exists. Certainly in Jackson when families get into trouble there are people that pitch in and help. But I think that we are all so increasingly busy and occupied with so many things that we ...

I'm not sure that is unique to Jackson Hole, I think small town environment. And as I say it is still alive here, but I think any of us who examine our own lives find ourselves too busy to see our best friends.

Jean: What do you remember about the town in the 50s?

Joanne: Lets see, the Wort was in the 40s, actually, I'm acquainted before the 50s with the valley and it was just so sweet and simple, there was just a wonderful log hospital a block down from the square on Cache street where the episcopal church is, Doctor [inaudible - McCloud?] had an office across the street. The one and only beautiful, fabulous doctor. It was just very, very simple, very few buildings, very few people and as I say, I think everybody knew everybody. The roads weren't paved, dirt roads in the 40s. People going out into the middle of the night on their own any way they could get there to take care of people, and Doc McCloud riding horseback up into the Gros Ventre to get to patients.

Jean: What do you know about Glenn's cancer?

Joanne: Cancer, is no question, always a very difficult thing. I think for them at that time it was very very frightening. Glenn went through it beautifully and as you know has done wonderfully well, plays golf, and has climbed and he fishes and has done everything since. Unfortunately, I think Glenn has had a good deal of constant pain which was not in any sense avoidable and has made it difficult for him, but he has born that as he has born everything in his life with a great deal of acceptance and charm and continues to appreciate life. I don't think I've ever heard Glenn Exum complain. I don't think he would know how, which is an exceptional quality.

Jean: How did the cancer affect the climbing community?

Joanne: We were not here. We were not that close to them at that time. Like I say, they are parents to me, we were certainly praying etc.

Jean: Did the parenting aspect help the cohesiveness of the group?

Joanne: The guides are strong individuals, rugged individuals in a sense and probably very competitive, and there's that side, if we are practical and not totally idealistic. Human qualities.

Jean: Was Glenn too traditional?

Joanne: I would guess a number of the younger guides thought so. That brings to mind Gary Hemming. I think Gary came up from California and had done a lot of the ... I don't even know the proper term, but with far more equipment, they were climbing in Yosemite and using all kinds of aids that were not used here, so definitely, I would think there were those who felt that this was too traditional and too conservative — would say this was too traditional. That group came just following us. Late 60s early 70s. And there was a totally new concept of mountaineering. And there definitely was conflict because, just a simple thing of the environmental feeling of not putting too many pitons in the mountains. I can remember

climbing with folks that really, I mean the guides would really consider where to place the pitons.

Say someone I've missed is Emerson. Someone who was really excellent. Dick died, but Pat has a mind. She would just have stories to tell you that would never stop. She would remember in detail the stories.